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272138Z Sep 05

UNCLAS ASUNCION 001224

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SENSITIVE

SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD DAN JOHNSON  
NSC FOR SUE CRONIN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL MARR PA

SUBJECT: (SBU) PARAGUAY: REFERENCES TO SOFA AGAINST U.S.

POLICY INTEREST

REF: A. ASUNCION 01212

1B. ASUNCION 01162

11. (U) This is an action request; see paragraph 6.

12. (SBU) We enjoy excellent military-to-military relations with Paraguay, and for many years Paraguay has provided an open and permissive environment for exercises and other military initiatives. The U.S. has an important policy interest in preserving that relationship and ensuring that the environment remains open and permissive. Public references to our military-to-military agreements with Paraguay as a Status of Forces of Agreement (SOFA) could work against that interest.

13. (SBU) The U.S. conducts exercises and other military initiatives in Paraguay based on exchanges of diplomatic notes that grant U.S. personnel permission to enter and Vienna Convention administrative and technical status (immunity from criminal liability, and limited immunity from civil liability for actions arising in the performance of their duties). The diplomatic notes must be approved by Paraguay's Congress.

14. (SBU) In 2005, for the sake of efficiency and transparency, we sent the Congress a single, consolidated note that covered exercises for a period of 18 months, rather than sending a separate note for each exercise (reflets). There were no significant changes to the content of the notes, as compared to notes we submitted in previous years; nor have we entered into any new substantive military-to-military agreements with Paraguay in recent years.

15. (SBU) In light of current local and regional pressures, which have manifested themselves in a widespread disinformation campaign about U.S.-Paraguayan military cooperation (reflets), it would be against U.S. policy interest to refer to our military-to-military agreements with Paraguay as a SOFA. The U.S. has not routinely referred to the agreements as a SOFA in the past. It could be interpreted to signal a change in the status quo if we start doing so now, which would give our adversaries momentum in their attempt to convince the region that the U.S. intends to deploy large numbers of troops to Paraguay for extended periods of time and build a permanent military base here. While such assertions are untrue, perceptions are what matter in this campaign to win over public opinion, and the perception that the U.S. has entered into a comprehensive new military-to-military agreement with Paraguay could sway the opinions of many people unable to discern our adversaries' blatant fabrications. In addition, the GOP continues to publicly deny that there has been any substantive change in our military-to-military relations in general, or to the terms for entry and protections of U.S. troops in particular. The GOP does not believe it has signed any substantially new agreement with us.

16. (SBU) Action request: Post requests that the Department and other USG officials refrain from publicly referring to U.S.-Paraguayan military-to-military agreements as a SOFA. To use that term could undermine the chances of continuing our permissive exercise environment.

KEANE